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SPEAK UP, CHICANO.

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GROWING CONCERN AMONG THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN POPULATION, AND THE NATION AS A WHOLE, CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES FACED BY THE SPANISH-SPEAKING MINORITY POPULATION POINTS TO THE REAWAKENING OF THEIR SOCIETY AND THEIR GRADUAL ASSUMPTION OF A GREATER DEGREE OF PRODUCTION IN SOCIETY. THOUGH FOR THE MOST PART MANY INEQUALITIES STILL EXIST, SOME EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO INTEGRATE CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND THE NEEDS OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS. RISING INVOLVEMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY ITSELF IS DIRECTING ATTENTION TO EDUCATIONAL ISSUES AND THE INTEGRATION OF MEXICAN AMERICAN PERSONNEL INTO RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS AND EDUCATIONAL POSITIONS. IT IS HOPED THAT THE ELEVATION OF THESE PERSONNEL WILL PROVIDE HEROS OR MODELS FOR THE YOUNG. WITH CAREER MODELS AVAILABLE TO EMULATE, PERHAPS GRADUALLY THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS FACED BY MANY OF THE PAST AND PRESENT MEXICAN AMERICAN POPULATION CAN BE ELIMINATED. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN THE MAY 1968 ISSUE OF "AMERICAN EDUCATION", PAGES 25-27. (DK)

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"SPEAK UP CHICANO"



I sat quietly and listened as 15 Mexican-American citizens who had gathered in a crumbling adobe community center in San Antonio's oldest slum and talked about their schools. As director of the U. S. Office of Education's Mexican-American Affairs Unit, I was there to learn what the local people felt were their most pressing educational needs.

"We ought to be consulted more about what goes on in our schools," the president of the Mexican-American Community Club said heatedly. "Our high school needs a Mexican-American on the counseling staff. But the school people say they can't find a qualified one to hire. Over 60 percent of the kids are Mexican-Americans and most of them have trouble speaking English. Yet we have only five Spanish-speaking teachers, and not a single person in the school office speaks Spanish. Is it any wonder the kids drop out like flies? The hell with the requirements. Let's take care of these kids' needs, and one of the first is to get somebody who can talk to them."

"Now wait just a minute," interrupted the assistant superintendent. "We have to follow State regulations, you know. You can't put just anybody in the counseling office. You tell us where to find a qualified Mexican-American teacher or counselor and we'll be delighted to hire him."

"At least you could have Mexican-Americans in the school as aides, couldn't you?" asked a neighborhood representative on the community action program board. "But you folks downtown made the requirements so high that none of our people could get a job. Why?"

"We have to have qualified people to work with the youngsters," answered the director of instruction.

"Qualified?" the president broke in. "What could be better qualifications than speaking the language and understanding the kids?"

"Well, we haven't seen much show of interest from the parents," countered a schoolman. "We can't get them out to PTA meetings, can't even get many of them to come to parents' night. We hired a Mexican-American school-community coordinator for some of our schools, but she's finding it an uphill battle getting the parents to take an interest in school matters."

And so it went at meeting after meeting that I attended with Lupe Anguiano and Dean Bistline, my co-workers in the Mexican-American Affairs Unit, in the 17 communities we visited on our three-week tour of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. We heard both Mexican-American community leaders and school people--some 1,700 altogether--pour out their frustrations, and we learned a great deal about what the people want and need and in what priority.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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In those five States alone, there are more than 5.5 million people of Spanish surname. Eight out of 10 live in California or Texas. Their numbers are constantly reinforced by a stream of immigrants from Mexico. Add the 1.5 million other Spanish-speaking people--Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central and South American, and Spanish--who live in Florida and the Northeastern and Midwestern industrial cities, and it becomes apparent that the United States has a substantial second minority group. They are a minority whose historical, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics set them apart from the Anglo community as dramatically as the Negro's skin set him apart. Few people outside the Southwest realize the degree of discrimination this difference has brought about.

For me the introduction to discrimination began 37 years ago when my father brought the family to California from Durango, Mexico. I was nine years old when we settled in San Diego in an extremely poor but well integrated community of Mexican-Americans, Negroes, and poor Anglos. The trouble was in school. I knew only a dozen words of English, so I just sat around the first few weeks not understanding a thing. I was not allowed to speak Spanish in class. But after school each day I played with neighborhood kids, so I soon picked up enough English to hold my own on the playground. Then I made this smattering of English do in class.

It didn't occur to me or my family to protest. In those days people didn't talk much about ethnic differences or civil rights. The chicanos (our favorite nickname for fellow Mexican-Americans) pretty much stayed "in their place," working as domestics and laborers in the cities or as wetback stoop laborers in the fields and orchards. Only a few became professionals or businessmen.

I remember being advised by my high school counselor to forget my dreams of going to college and becoming a teacher. "They don't hire Mexican-Americans," he said. Then World War II came along, and when I got out of the Army in 1944 the G.I. Bill of Rights saw me through San Diego College. I got a teaching job and eventually became a junior high school principal in San Diego. But my experience was a rare one for those times.

Since then conditions have changed a good deal. There is spirit in the Mexican-American community now. On my recent trip I saw a pride in the young people that was not so evident when I was growing up. The chicano today is proud of his role as an American. Many parents, even those who are illiterate, as were mine, are determined that their children will not be like them. And they see education as the means. But along with their determination has come a new impatience. Gone is the meek, long-suffering separateness of the chicanos. They are beginning to stand up and make their voices heard.

"Head Start is great," said a parent-businessman at one of our meetings. "But it isn't enough. Some of the programs are only for the summer and our kids need a whole year if they are to have a chance to start out even with the Anglo kids."

"Many of our kids go to school hungry," another complained. "Why can't the schools use more of their Government money for food and health services?"

As we listened to their grievances, I realized that our most valuable role at these meetings was as a bouncing board for their ideas. With us present, both school and community leaders found themselves saying things to each other that they had heretofore said only within their own group. Inevitably, though, they looked to us, the spokesman for the Government, to "do something." Of course, that was not our role. We were there to help them establish lines of communication and to explain to them the ways in which the U. S. Office of Education can support their efforts. But we had to make clear that it is they, the State and local school people and the community, who must design the programs and carry them out.

Nationally there is a growing amount of concern about Mexican-American affairs that has generated much real help. In evidence is the recent series of conferences at Tucson, Pueblo, and El Paso sponsored by the National Education Association. Also, the Federal Government created three new agencies with specific responsibilities to the Mexican-American: the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, which assists in development of services that cover the wide range of Government activities; the United States-Mexico Commission on Border Development and Friendship, which is charged with creating programs to improve cooperation on both sides of the border; and the U. S. Office of Education's Mexican-American Affairs Unit, which seeks to bring some expertise to bear on the education of the bilingual-bicultural citizen and to develop a focus on the effort. This unit is now supported by a newly created Advisory Committee on Mexican-American Education. Still another evidence of concern and help is the passage by Congress last December of the Bilingual Education Act (title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), which authorizes funds and support for schools to develop programs in which both English and the native language of the student can be used as teaching tools until a mastery of English has been achieved.

These are a healthy start, as is the rising involvement of the Mexican-American community itself in directing attention to educational issues. Still, some major obstacles remain in the way of the Mexican-American's progress toward educational equality. Of prime consideration is the shortage of teachers qualified to cope with the Mexican-American's particular situation. There are only 2,000 bilingual teachers in the elementary and secondary schools today. Equally distressing is the lack of teachers who are even aware of the chicano's cultural background and recognize his language as an asset. A striking contradiction has us, on the one hand, spending millions of dollars to encourage school children to learn a foreign language and, on the other, frowning upon Mexican-American

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children speaking Spanish in school. The impression they receive is that there must be something inherently bad about their language. This, of course, leads to self-deprecation. To make the situation even more ridiculous, they are often asked to take Spanish as a foreign language later in school.

To correct this situation means teachers who can treat Spanish as an asset to the student while he is learning English. And that will require a tremendous effort in teacher education. As a starter, the Teacher Corps, cooperating with the Mexican-American Affairs Unit, has set up a high intensity language training component for a group of interns teaching in schools with a number of Spanish-speaking students. This program lasts six weeks and gives considerable attention to cross cultural values as well as to language instruction.

A second obstacle to a comprehensive education for the chicano is the lack of well-integrated curriculums. As I toured the Southwest, I saw good programs here and there for preschool youngsters, some good adult basic education going on in one place, a good program to educate the whole migrant family in another. But in no single place did I see a school district whose curriculum and instructional program correlated with the needs of the Mexican-Americans from kindergarten through high school. There were glimpses of hope, though.

In San Antonio, Texas, I was impressed with a program developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory of Austin that used linguistic techniques to develop the fluency of Mexican-American youngsters in oral language as a foundation for reading. Intensive instruction is given in English as a second language, and an identical program of instruction is given in Spanish. Started two years ago in nine schools and now a formal operation in the first two grades in San Antonio with plans for continuation in grades 3 and 4, the program shows encouraging results. The first group of youngsters in the program are now equaling national norms in reading and some are even achieving the fifth-grade level. Traditionally Mexican-American boys and girls in southern Texas have lagged at least a year behind the national norms.

San Diego, California, has developed a demonstration center for English as a second language to help school districts create specialized educational programs for students who initially learned a language other than English. One of its bright features has been the large number of parents who worked with the professional staff in designing these programs for non-English-speaking parents and youngsters alike.

The Foreign Language Innovative Curricula Studies project at Ann Arbor, Michigan, used funds from title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to develop a bilingual curriculum program with materials for language arts instruction. The program has been aimed at the Spanish-speaking youngster--both migrant and permanent resident--whose linguistic handicaps severely limit his educational achievement.

It is for the primary grades and stresses the development of materials which are exciting to all youngsters and are suitable for use by teachers with a minimum of specialized training.

By sharing their experiences in these innovative programs, school districts can help one another. And a wealth of good ideas are emerging from conferences such as the one sponsored by the Advisory Committee on Mexican-American Education and the Mexican-American Affairs Unit in Austin, Texas. Here at the Office of Education we have a special task force that works closely with the eight bureaus in considering funding proposals for projects aimed at improving educational opportunities for the Mexican-American.

A third obstacle to the young chicano's educational success is a lack of models--"heroes," if you will. The school needs to put before him successful Mexican-Americans whom he can emulate as he sets his educational goals. A teacher, a counselor, a principal who is Mexican-American can do the trick. Discrimination in past generations has, unfortunately, limited the number of such persons. In many heavily Mexican-American schools, there is not a single Mexican-American teacher, let alone a counselor or administrator. Now, however, with the chicano's education improving and discrimination diminishing, I am hopeful that more and more of today's children will have the career models before them that they need.

If my impression of all this activity and promise is correct, the American society is about to see the dawning of a new era. The Mexican-American will become a far more productive member of society. His cultural and linguistic heritage will be turned to good use.

Although the chicano has suffered and lost much in the last 100 years, he now intends to do what is necessary to win his fight for educational equality. And he will do it today. Manana is too late.